

## **ABSTRACT**

**DISSERTATION/THESIS/RESEARCH PAPER/CREATIVE PROJECT:** The Incommensurate Wor(l)ds: Epistemic Rhetoric and Faceted Classification of Communication Mechanics in Virtual Worlds

**STUDENT:** Sarah Smith-Robbins

**DEGREE:** Doctor of Philosophy

**COLLEGE:** Sciences and Humanities

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Brummett's ontological view of epistemic rhetoric frames a world in which reality is truly only shaped once it is communicated. This reality creation is uniquely performed within online spaces that are separated from the physical world by means of programming code and internal culture. These spaces are constructed of language and constitute new realities (Chesebro ) which are fundamentally rhetorical. However, the study of these tools lack shared terminology with which to classify and understand their potential as educational spaces. This study explores connections between communication mechanics of multi-user social technologies and their effectiveness as teaching tools. The study focuses on virtual worlds (defined as WAN-based, persistent, multi-user spaces which include avatars), such as *Second Life* and *World of Warcraft*, as examples of multi-user social technologies because these tools converge mechanics and communication tools found separately elsewhere. Communication mechanics are operationalized as facets found through the application of Shiyali Ranganathan's Faceted Classification method. The facets of seventy worlds are first identified. These facets are then used to describe typical uses of the facets through Activity Theory (Engeström) and Genre

Ecology Models (Spinuzzi). Finally, a framework is suggested for selecting virtual worlds and the most effective activities within them by ensuring coordination among the strategic, tactical, and operational goals and activities of the tool, the course/instructor, and student.